



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Department of Toxic Substances Control

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES CONTROL PRESENTS FORT ORD'S HISTORY

Fort Ord has enjoyed a long and celebrated history. During the Mexican-American War in 1846, the Monterey area that included this future military post, along with the rest of California, was claimed for the United States, although Fort Ord would not be established for some time to follow. While visiting the region in 1879, author Robert Louis Stevenson remarked that its "beaches are white with weathered whale bones."

Fort Ord was formally instituted in 1917 by the United States Army. Its local topography was ideal as an infantry training center for soldiers heading overseas to wage and win two world wars. The site was employed as a basic training center for American soldiers during World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. A critical part of that training targeted live fire ammunition and ordnance. After 1975, Fort Ord was used to train infantry troops until it was selected for decommission in 1991 and ultimately closed in 1994. Although Army personnel still operate parts of the base, no active Army division is currently stationed at Fort Ord.

Not surprisingly, Fort Ord's unrivalled renown as a military training center presented one of the biggest environmental challenges to its productive reuse. Several areas within the installation's 28,000 acres included munitions training ranges and maneuver areas, where troops acquired their skills and also where fired but unexploded munitions accumulated. These unexploded ordnance items (UXO), along with munitions that were buried intentionally and are referred to as discarded military munitions (DMM), are now collectively referenced as munitions and explosives of concern (MEC). MEC are known to have significantly affected the ability to reuse the former Fort Ord.

The challenge of addressing MEC was not beyond the mission of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)—to protect public health and the environment. Soon after the 1988 Base Realignment and Closure process, DTSC initiated a munitions oversight role at Fort Ord and made great strides in transferring advanced digital technologies from the laboratory to the field. In response to DTSC's oversight effort, the Army launched an Ordnance Detection and Discrimination Study, which has since become the gold standard among such nationwide research.

DTSC, too, rose to the national level by serving with the Western Governors Association, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and Department of Interior as the State Chair for the first UXO work group from 1993 to 1996, bringing recognition to California that is still acknowledged today. Other technological advances, such as airborne systems, were also used at Fort Ord. While these advances enabled DTSC to lead the first privatized MEC cleanup in the state to meet residential cleanup standards, DTSC understands that further research, development, and testing are essential to conducting safer, more efficient, and more cost-effective cleanups.

Because Fort Ord is also home to many threatened and endangered species found in several highly specialized habitats, ecological aspects of the cleanup have been formidable. The Army met the test by preparing a Habitat Management Plan, which passed muster with a dozen local, state, and federal agencies and has driven every aspect of Fort Ord's environmental investigations and cleanups.

Fort Ord has come a long way since Stevenson's desolate depiction was recorded—from its preeminence as a training station for hundreds of thousands of American soldiers to a scenic location for significant future residential and commercial development, recreation, and more. Fort Ord remains history in the making.